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Michigan Senate resolution urging social studies testing sent to Congress

LANSING — The Michigan Senate is urging Congress to include social studies testing as a part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

State Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, and a number of groups representing social studies teachers hailed passage of Senate Resolution 108 as a way to re-establish the importance of social studies.

“For young people to become good citizens of our nation, they need the knowledge that only social studies offers them,” said Kuipers, who chairs the Senate Education Committee and sponsor of the resolution. “I know that reading and math are critically important to success as an adult, but more than just those two subjects are needed for a well-rounded education.”

Social studies teachers say the subject has been pushed aside in favor of math and reading because federal law requires regular testing of those subjects. The unintended consequence of the required testing was that schools pared back social studies teaching, especially at the elementary level.

“Our intention is not to diminish the importance of improving math and science education, nor the earlier emphasis on literacy,” said J. Kelli Sweet, executive director and a former social studies teacher in the Kalamazoo Public Schools, before the Senate Education Committee. “However, the future of our state and our nation depends on an education that produces graduates that are democratically literate.”

Renay Scott, president of the Michigan Council for the Social Studies, called social studies skills essential to developing civic understanding in young people.

“Evidence from research in the field, poll results, MEAP and ACT performance, and anecdotal work all suggest that too many students lack basic knowledge in one or more of the four basic core social studies areas: civics, economics, geography and history,” she said. “That such a situation has evolved is untenable in a nation that prides itself on its history, its system of government and its place as a leader in the global community.”

More information about the Michigan Council for the Social Studies is available on its Web site, www.michcouncilss.org.

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